



Billy Edwards (right) and some of his boxing proteges in training.

Training Gym for Boxers

IN A MUSTY, drab room over the Union Market a dozen men, white and colored, are sweatily at work in boxing trunks and jerseys. Two, protected by headgears greasy with age, spar in a makeshift ring; others slug away at heavy bags, suspended from the ceiling; another beats a rataplan on a light bag, still others skip rope or do body exercises.

All are aspirants for fame and fortune in the prize-fight ring, and this is Billy Edwards' gym, where they train.

Some are professionals, but young in their careers; others are adolescent amateurs who have yet to learn that they are embarking on a cruel and sometimes disheartening business. You can spot the amateurs, not only by their youth, but by the earnestness with which they train. The pros have less enthusiasm for the drudgery of their profession.

The walls of the gym are garishly festooned with posters for bouts held long ago and a few photos of men who were champions or near-champs. One sop to art in the decor is what purports to be a landscape done in crayon by one of the fighters.

The place is a bedlam, with the thudding of fists, shuffling of feet and slapping of rope, superimposed on the steady blast from a radio turned on full volume. From time to time a huge man with a cigar in his mouth looks at his watch and yells, "Time!"—at which point all the dancing, shuffling figures cease or slow down activity. A few minutes later "time" is called again, and the figures pick up again in full tempo, like puppets jerked to life.

The man who presides over this ceremonial confusion is Billy Edwards, a genial 240-pound ex-fighter, who used to box 17 years ago at 155 pounds. Now he is a trainer and manager and operator of this gym which he laughingly calls "The Stillman's of the South." (Stillman's gym in New York is the biggest and best-known training place for fighters in the East, perhaps in the world.)

Billy is blind in one eye, the result of an accidental injury while training. "Why, I fought for five years with one eye and nobody knew it," he says.

Approximately 75 fighters and would-be fighters train in his gym each day, he says. He charges them \$6 a month,

and when he books a fight for one of the boys he "cuts" one-third of the fighter's purse for himself, the usual managerial fee. The better part of Billy's working day is spent at a pay phone in the room, talking to promoters, matchmakers, managers and fighters. He always carries a pocketful of nickels for this purpose.

At one point the phone rings and Billy, cigar in mouth, answers. He listens for a moment, then yells: "You wanna fight Monday? Boy, how you gonna fight, you don't train? You eat hot dogs last night, I bet, and you don't even get out and run this morning. Man, you're in awful shape. You come in and train—and then we talk about a fight."

Billy naturally has favorites among his trainees. One is an Armstrong High School boy named "Sonny" Bunn, who has won 17 of his 19 professional fights. Sonny is a lieutenant in the Cadet Corps, and shows up for workouts still in uniform. The hangers-on play with his sword and scabbard while he does his training.

Another of his favorites is "Stonewall" Jackson, the youngster from Phelps Voca-



Jackie Ford has a stomach-toughening treatment.

Star Staff Photos by Francis Roult.

tional School, whose art work graces the wall. "Man, that Stonewall comes in here, he sounds like an army," proudly exclaims Billy. "Boy, is he loud!" But, adds Billy, Stonewall is a fine fighter and a great natural athlete.

As Billy talks a wiry little terrier jumps up and paws at his legs. The dog is the gym mascot and is named, appropriately enough, Punchy.

The phone rings again, and

over the din Billy holds a conversation. His end of it goes something like this: "How much does he weigh? 155? You want to get somebody for him for Monday? Okay, I'll see what I can do."

He hangs up and lets his gaze fall on two boys who are belaboring each other in the ring with 10-ounce gloves while the radio blares out a tune called, "Brother, Beware."

—S. B.